

# **Foundation Year**

**FY0005 - Key elements of an  
effective argument.**

**By Chico Demmenie  
University of Winchester.**

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## **Introduction**

There are many key parts to any argument but here we'll discuss some of the most important things to consider when making any sort of argument. The most important part of an argument is a consideration of if the argument has any sort of substance, that is; that the argument you present is relevant within the scope of debate or that the scope of the debate should include your area of argument. Trying to identify the method of argument best suited to your point from the 6 main methods is also important to how your argument comes across. Lastly, summarising and structuring your argument properly can really help to get the message that you're trying to convey across to the reader (Bonnett, 2008).

## **Substance and Importance**

Any argument or point to be made in a debate must have a clear purpose that is important enough to mention in said debate. The point that you make must build on a previous point or on the question being asked.

Without this substance your point or argument is easily struck down by any party to the debate with a short but effective "so what?".

Without clear substance the argument that you're trying to make becomes practically irrelevant and brings no new idea or reasoning to the debate, it becomes a non-argument (Cottrell, 2011). Making points about minor details without relating it back to the overall discussion, bringing forward a grand or abstract idea that has no relation to the debate or presenting facts with no point at all, are all ways that you might avoid substance in a debate.

You could relate this to software development as you could polish a program by adding as many features as you want but if the core functionality of the software doesn't work or isn't useful then nobody will ever use it, this is commonly known as feature creep (Georgescu, 2020).

## **Identifying the best method**

There are a few main methods of argument that can be used to make a point in debate. The first is the identification and criticism of tension or contradiction in an opponent's position, possibly coupled with an accusation of the person being hypocritical (Cottrell, 2011). Arguing that a cause and effect relationship exists between two subjects is another method of argument that can be really effective but it should always be argued in the light of evidence rather than asserted without cause. Observations or hypotheses can also be used to create an argument based on facts or data, this is the method by which the scientific method functions (Gauch, 2012). One way to argue an opponent's claim is to argue about the words that they use, take issue with the use of a word or perhaps the absence of one. Ultimately the language we use is important and conveying the correct meaning is crucial to having a productive debate, so challenging the language that your opponent uses could change the conversation quite drastically (Bonnett, 2008).

Knowing which method you are using and making sure that it is appropriate for the debate at hand and the point you want to make can be a really effective way to make sure that your message comes across convincingly.

This is similar to how a programmer would need to identify the appropriate language or languages to use for a particular application.

### **Summarising and clarifying**

An argument is practically useless if the listener or reader doesn't understand it. To make your argument as clear as possible it is important that the argument is structured, summarised and clarified as much as possible. If your argument cannot be written down in about a sentence then it will most likely be difficult to communicate effectively to your audience and it would be wise to choose another.

Fairbairn, for instance, proposes that with a lack of structure or overall simplicity, "your reader can easily lose sight of even the most central ideas that you are trying to present." (Fairbairn, 1996)

The structure of any piece of writing should usually have a beginning, a middle and an end so as to give the reader a feeling that they know what is going on. Helping to guide the reader through your arguments and being careful about the way that your ideas are organised gives the reader a feeling that they are more aware of the ideas that have already been presented, what you are talking about now and where you might be heading.

Visual structure can achieve similar things by creating 'signposts' giving each part of your argument or writing a heading or title will help the reader to identify what they're reading and splitting each different point into paragraphs will easily denote when you change tack in your writing (Fairbairn, 1996).

### **Conclusion**

Making sure that your points have substance and that your arguments are built on solid ground is possibly most important, this won't make your arguments great but they'll fall at the first hurdle if you ignore it. Making sure that they're relevant to the conversation is similarly important, although it may be accepted that rather than building on other points you could argue that your idea should be part of the wider debate when it is not already.

Secondly choosing the best method of argument, making sure that you understand how to use it, and utilising it effectively can really give your argument a lot more punch. This is where a great argument stands out from a good argument, being able to identify the correct point to make, the way in which it should be made and then executing that is difficult but will allow you to stand out amongst the crowd.

Lastly summarising or structuring and clarifying your argument is key to making sure that the reader or listener understands what you mean, if you choose the right words it will stick in the audience's mind for much longer and have a much better effect. This part could make or break

your argument; if you can choose the right words to say, the words that could stick in a person's mind for long enough then you could easily win the debate or even gain infamy, but if you falter then you may lose the debate on this alone.

## References

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